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LIBRARY SCIENCE  
LIBRARY

# THE ASSISTANT LIBRARIAN

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# THE ASSISTANT LIBRARIAN

Official Journal of the Association of Assistant Librarians  
(*Section of the Library Association*)

EDITOR: W. G. SMITH.

Westminster Public Libraries, Buckingham Palace Road, London, S.W.1.

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JUNE, 1957

## Librarians ARE Human

Reflections of a novice at the A.A.L. Conference

N. Saunders White, Kensington Public Library

In his summing up of the Conference at Winchester, the Editor stated in his opening sentence, "What good is a Conference?" Before I attended the Conference these were my very words, except to add, . . . "especially of librarians!" The very thought of an organised gathering of library types sends cold shivers up my spine. For 10 years or so I've been watching them climb the ladder of fame, powerless myself most of the time to clamber even on to the second rung. I divided them into three groups—the so-called professionals, toothy, horsey females, frigid and forbidding. The males thick-lensed, balding, with food stained suits and nicotine fingers, muttering Cutter or rambling Ranganathan, dull, boring and all of them slightly demented. Then there are the unapproachable librarians, the ones that read papers at L.A. Conferences, that write textbooks and one can imagine them sitting Proust-like in padded offices, handling tenderly with signet-ringed fingers, morocco-bound books and handmade paper—aloof and far-off; awe-inspiring and inhuman.

Now, can you imagine how ghastly a liberal mixture of these creatures would be? And a week-end of it, too! Well, I could imagine it, and that is why I make it a rule never to mix with these professional types excepting the very small proportion of sane, healthy ones that do,



LIBRARIANS  
ARE  
HUMAN  
The Editor's  
bedroom  
during an  
informal  
conference  
session.

fortunately, exist and upon whom in my opinion, the future of Librarianship rests. These few (some of them actually F.L.A.'s), I am happy to number among my friends.

It was the insistence of these few that brought me to the Conference. You see, there is another reason for my reluctance to mix,—a personal one, in fact, a little matter of humility. If you haven't already guessed,—I am not qualified. I also have a conscience. How could I possibly have the affrontry to be in the same room with such a chatter of chartered?—Me?, with my insignificant 5 passes G.C.E. and Entrance! However, my friends insisted that it would do my soul good and might even help with the exams. So to please them more than anything else, I went. To be more precise, we went; in my car. (A significant point here, I think,—only the unqualified G.D. can afford to run a car!).

My silence during the journey down was construed as a doubt as to the mechanical ability of the car to reach Winchester, but really I was still inclined to think that I was in for a miserable week-end, surrounded by egg-heads. Nevertheless, my red monster rumbled and roared all its 20 h.p. over the Surrey hills with never a falter, and arrived safely to the accompaniment of up-raised eyebrows of earlier arrivals at King Alfred's College (expecting, no doubt, 3 deputies and a chief at the very least!).

As we queued up to register, I thought my suspicions were about to be confirmed, when we were issued with name-tags. *Name-tags!* I almost laughed aloud! I looked around. Yes, there we all were, tagged and docketed, labelled and wrapped, like a gathering of prize cattle. In fact, I mentioned so to my companion who agreed, and we both laughed as he suggested that it might be of some use as at least we would know whom to avoid! I did not feel quite so miserable then, at least I had found *one* person who was normal. Later on I had my first shock. I somehow thought the name had a familiar look—light suddenly dawned—I had been speaking to Tynemouth! A name I had seen more than once at the end of learned articles in various library periodicals! A name I thought was just a pseudonym for yet another "professional type" with a head full of cobwebs. But I was staggered. He was normal, healthy, ordinary—like myself—it was impossible! Revelations were not to end there, however, for among the tagged and docketed, chatting naturally was Miss Willson, my tutor for entrance. I must have looked so taken aback that she actually spoke to me! I then found she was not only Miss Willson, F.L.A., President of A.L.A., but also just plain Miss Willson a charming, friendly person.

Then there was the fabulous J. Binder, the name I associate always as the Editor of those curiously tinted sheets of late and happy memory, who I thought of as some weird ancient in tweeds. Far from it, in fact I got on very well with her till I was escorted firmly by my F.L.A. friends to view other "names" in the profession. And there they all were: Surridge and McColvin, Tomlinson and Smith, Clough and Lockwood and scores more. Due to them I came away from the Conference with a new conception of librarians en masse. They *are*, generally speaking, human and approachable! Qualities that I had thought were the last to be associated with "professional" librarians. Strange how an idea built up over twelve long years can be so rudely shattered in such a short week-end.

Regarding the actual sessions, I shall not go into detail as they were reported accurately by the Editor in the May issue. I shall say that I enjoyed them, my group being conducted mainly by a Mr. Bill, with a confidence bred by years of thought and experience.

But I must mention the College visit. On Saturday afternoon most of us visited either the College, Cathedral or Southampton. I decided to see the College, and most of us who were in my coach agreed we had chosen wisely for we were shown round by W. de Wykeham himself, or so it seemed, who took us with obvious delight all over the College; "his College!" . . . "There, look; there's the bell, look, what they rings to bring 'em to meals, there it is look!" . . . and later . . . "and the little boys 'ad to eat all their meals off these boards here, see, there they are look. They had their meat in the middle and put their tatties round the edge to keep the gravy in, see!" I wished I had a tape recorder with me, he was a wonderful old man.

Now I come to a most important point, and I feel I must use this opportunity to bring to light certain aspects of the Conference which appear to go unnoticed or forgotten. It is an aspect which never gets official recognition and yet it plays not the least important part towards the success of the week-end. I refer, of course, to the amount of preparation and work that appears to be done far into the night by various organisation and discussion leaders and others to ensure the success and smooth-running of the Conference. Both Friday evening and Saturday as I was retiring early, to be refreshed for the next day's sessions, I could hear in various rooms people talking, walking up and down, and quietly humming to themselves, doubtless preparing for the next day's discussions. In fact the amount of sleep lost during the evening showed in the faces of many the next day. Very few people realise just how much some delegates give of their own time during the week-end to make it worthwhile. On Sunday morning, for instance, coming out of my room, I met one delegate who had tried unsuccessfully several times during the night and early morning to prevent several of his colleagues from overtaxing themselves by these rigorous evening preparations. Do you know those fellows wouldn't hear of it? They pushed him out and actually shut the door in his face, telling him to go to bed, they were going to continue whatever anyone said!

At the final summing-up session I noticed that several delegates were suffering from lack of sleep, some even appeared to be under doctor's orders as they surreptitiously consumed sips from what seemed to be bottles of medicinal fluid (shrub cordial?). Stout fellows, I thought. If I could have overcome my own nervousness, I might have ventured to pass a resolution thanking these people, particularly for their activities on our behalf—even if most of us were prevented from sleeping by their informal discussions.

To sum up my impressions of this, my first conference, I can say with certainty that it won't be my last. That it proved to me that librarians *can* be human, I repeat this statement because I believe it to be a very important one—if librarians can be human then there is some possibility that we may be a profession after all.

- That there are worse libraries than my own, somewhere . . . !
- That Mr. McColvin (Junior) could top the Palladium bill any time he wanted to.
- That I must get qualified post haste.
- That to get further than grade 3, I shall need not only my hard-earned G.C.E. and entrance, but A.L.A., F.L.A., and an honours degree, too!

And finally (in all seriousness) an excellently organised week-end, in an absence of formality, many new friends made and one step nearer the compleat librarian.

# YOUR Letters

For  
Mr. Callander

Thank you for printing Mr. Callander's refreshing constructive and uncomplicated remarks (*April Assistant*).

measured in such an essentially practical profession as ours, by examining members a second time over (for remember they've already been examined on detailed matters at Registration stage) on such matters as *Development of Swedish Libraries*, *Staff Nomenclature*, *the History of Lending Libraries*, and the *Conduct of Architectural Competitions*.

There comes a time in everyone's professional life when a certain level of responsibility has been reached—one may be a Chief Assistant, a Branch Librarian or a Department Head. For many at this level, responsibilities don't really cease when the library doors close, and in fact time spent in study might be put to far better use in critically reading some of the contents of one's library stock.

Extended periods of study may make one an extremely good reciter of facts—but no reader will be consoled when asking advice about a book to be told "Well of course I don't know much about it—I haven't read it—I'm studying, you know!"

Mr. Callander suggests an interview as a means of judging calibre and maturity on admin. matters. Carry it further and let an examining committee come and watch a candidate at work and see what he's making of his job. Let them see, in fact, whether he's a good practical librarian, which is really all that matters. Such a method of examination would certainly cause all candidates to apply themselves to the jobs they're doing with an eye to disposing of a few unnecessary routines.

Best of all, the readers would ultimately benefit, particularly if the senior assistants to whom they went for help, knew more about the insides of the books on their shelves.

FRANK BAGULEY, *Berkshire County Library*.

And  
Against

Mr. Callander is under a misapprehension: rural libraries do not necessarily provide second class service, as he implies. The reader living in the rural areas of some parts of this country has access to County Library services at least the equal of most Municipal Libraries, and often infinitely better than the independent Libraries in neighbouring small towns.

No-one who works in a County Library would deny that even the best County has a long way to go before it reaches perfection. There are good County Libraries and bad County Libraries, just as there are good and bad Municipal Libraries—but I wonder how good Municipal Libraries were thirty-seven years after they were started.

GEOFFREY SMITH.

Virile  
Males

Surely Mr. Forshaw's letter takes first prize so far this year for confusion of thought? If split duties and Saturday afternoon work are a bar to recruitment, by all means let them be abolished; but Mr. Forshaw seems to say they are a bar only to hairy-kneed rugger types and clean-limbed cricketers (these are some clichés you didn't use, Mr. Forshaw), and the implication is that librarianship is the loser thereby. May I say that if the inverted intellectual snobbery apparent

in the remark about "symphony concerts and what-not" is typical of the hearties, the opposite is the case?

Among my librarian friends I number people who go mountaineering, running, walking for long distances, and numerous types who daily risk their necks in sports cars and on large motor-cycles. Many of them would probably find a quiet Saturday afternoon's cricket a trifle tame. I can say this quite without bias, since I myself take almost no physical recreation, and would undoubtedly incur Mr. Forshaw's strictures.

It is, I think, true that the library attracts a different masculine type from, say, the Town Hall. Psychology teaches us that there are few purely male men or female women (and experience teaches us that where such do occur they are very dull companions) and in libraries we are likely to find people of some sensitivity, little fear of solitude, and a dislike of running with the herd. That these people are effeminate I have tried to refute in the preceding paragraph.

Maybe Mr. Forshaw has been got at, as by the chap in the pub., perhaps by some of his rugger pals, and that, lacking a good case to defend libraries, he prefers to join the attack with some particularly rusty old weapons. I suggest that, next time he meets this down-the-mines or in-the-Army argument, he enquires in what way the normal office or shop affords more manly employment. Ninety per cent. of the middle class must be lacking in virility, and that's a pretty poor look-out for our women. They'd better read *Lady Chatterley* and take action accordingly.

If Mr. Forshaw is really concerned primarily with recruitment, then let him agitate as best he can for the improvement of library salaries. When these are equated with those of other local government departments, and local government salaries are really competitive, then our staffing problems will be at an end, awkward hours notwithstanding.

KENNETH THIMBLEBY, *Camberwell Public Libraries.*

Further to Mr. Lyle's letter in your April issue, the examination fees are surely already excessive. Take Group "A" for example:—

Exam Fees	£	s.	d.
Examination entrance fee	..	..	1 11 6
Stamps and envelopes	..	..	6
Compulsory membership of the L.A.	..	4	4 0
	£	5	16 0

It is difficult to see what other benefits one receives for the £4 4s. Od., except the *L.A. Record*, a periodical generally agreed to be of monumental dullness.

G. WAKEMAN, *Travelling Librarian, Herefordshire County Library.*

**Soul-less  
Penance**

While agreeing with Mr. Ivor Kemp that much of the L.A. syllabus can be studied without the aid of lectures, I suggest that such a back-breaking and soul-less penance is highly undesirable.

Fellow-students in a class give each other opportunities for exchange of ideas and experience, not only in the formal lesson period, but in the intellectual freedom of the coffee breaks. The student's mind has a "positive need to brush, scrape, kindle itself, gossiping."

A degree or professional qualification gained without "ever attending any lectures at all" is hardly worth the paper it is written on. It may become a bookworm, but not a professional man who intends to "move between books and readers."

ALAN THOMAS, *Lewisham Public Libraries.*

# Your Letters

## Censoring Mr. O'Leary

**Mr. Benge, in April, claimed that the "real O'Leary's dead and gone"**

I quote Mark Twain, with my well-known powers of misquotation, in saying that Mr. Benge's announcement of my demise is grossly exaggerated.

I beg to inform you, sir, that I still breathe, and, despite Mr. Benge, I surface for air more than once a year. This annual Moby Dick to which Mr. Benge refers, is made possible by one simple fact. Its publication is assured. The cost is borne by the Borough of Dagenham. It is with dead certainties only that such authorship as I possess flourishes. By the "splendid act" does Mr. Benge reveal that his generation reads Henley? Was he inspired to this by the announcement of "the sundown splendid and serene, death"?

I would like to number myself among the poets—I cannot write poetry. I would like to have found in libraries the material for a great novel. I have not. My other literate interests are not likely to bring me before a television audience.

To what then shall I turn? The "Library Association Record?" But there I shall find Mr. Benge and a whole bench of tea tasters. "Why does the tea generally taste of boiled boots?" (I cannot impress too strongly on my younger brethren, the virtues of the *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*). I have great difficulty in getting even a letter published in the *Record*. My views, and a very substantial list of omissions, on the *Union List of Reference Books* (Greater London Division A.A.L.) was declined. Dr. Walford edited this publication. He also edits the *Record*. A letter to the *Record* was recently refused (but is no longer) on the grounds that it was rude to a library long hallowed by all.

I assure Mr. Benge, that I shall continue (having no ulcers) to masquerade not as a butcher or one of the herd of "happy pigs," but just in my "splendid act" as—

J. G. O'LEARY, Librarian, Dagenham Public Libraries.

**Dr. A. J. Walford, Editor of the Record replies:—**

*The Union list of reference books.* I replied at the time to Mr. O'Leary's letter, agreeing with him that the *Union List* had been poorly edited. The "very substantial list of omissions" could not be incorporated since the *Union List* never went into another edition. The forthcoming *Union list of bibliographies and reference books*, edited by Miss J. M. Harries and L. M. Payne, will be a much better compilation.

*Mr. O'Leary's letter to the Record* was refused in its original form. With certain passages omitted, it was published in the April *Record* (p. 140). Mr. O'Leary was informed that his letter would be published with certain omissions and to this he agreed.

**—and Mr. O'Leary comments:—**

My letter appeared in the April *Record*. The dots represented parts that the Editor thought unfit for publication. He omitted my postscript which was this: "Out of print books—Oman—'Art of War,' wanted for 'A' Level." Which it is!

The L.A.R. seems to devote its attention to out of print "cotton-tail" series and the like.

## Where Did Mother Goose Wander?

May I use Miss Castell's remarks on nursery rhymes as an excuse to bring one of my favourite bibliographies to the notice of readers of the *Assistant Librarian*? This is Geoffrey Handley-Taylor's "Selected bibliography of literature relating to nursery rhyme reform" (True Aim, 1952).

Here, in four pages, may be found, chronologically arranged, references to writers as diverse as Sarah Trimmer and Nathaniel Gubbins, and the work concludes with a list of unsavoury elements to be found in the average collection of nursery rhymes. These include two cases of unlawful imprisonment, four of cursing, and one of death by shrivelling. The rest are of such a nature as to suggest that Mother Goose spent more time on the staff of the *News of the World*, possibly at the same time as Father Christmas (whose opposition to that useful device, the all-night fire, is well-known) was developing those activities which have had such socially harmful consequences in the TV give-away show.

A. C. BUBB, *National Central Library*.

## Assistance to Staff

I would like to amplify the contribution *Assistance to Staff* by Mr. Shearman in the issue for May regarding information on living conditions in Commonwealth territories. The Royal Empire Society produces 38 mimeographed papers designed specially to give just the factual information on cost of living, housing, health, education, taxation, etc., that the intending applicant for a post overseas finds most useful. These papers, which cover the Commonwealth territories except Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Southern Rhodesia, which have well established information services in London, are revised annually. Many public and other libraries already receive these, but further applications are welcomed.

With reference to Mr. Shearman's recommendation of the publication *The British Commonwealth*, I think it should be pointed out that it, in spite of a wealth of factual detail, suffers greatly from the inadequacy of its list of contents and its lack of index. If Librarians would be more outspoken in their criticisms of such deficiencies in quick reference books, there would be more chance of persuading publishers to remedy such defects in future editions.

DONALD H. SIMPSON, *Librarian, Royal Empire Society*.

## A Lesson from Sweden

At Malmö public library, Sweden, each senior staff member is allocated two foreign library periodicals to read regularly. At the monthly staff meeting all important articles which have appeared are reviewed by each librarian concerned and a general discussion ensues.

Commenting on recent issues of the *Assistant Librarian*, one senior librarian told me that her staff was amazed and amused by the letters written on "Censorship." Sweden evidently has no such problem. There the librarian is publicly regarded as a professional person paid to select the best books for the community. The librarian is not given authority, only to have it challenged by laymen; not is he expected to choose the best books on all subjects and then hide a portion of them in the librarian's office or elsewhere. In signing a membership voucher, a reader applies to use any book purchased by the library and the parent or guardian by his countersignature accepts the librarian's selection likewise. All the Malmö copies of Kinsey are displayed on the lending department shelves, the librarian told me, and she asked the fate of copies in my library. I dared not tell her that more than a few libraries at home do not purchase this type of book presumably because they are considered unimportant, too important or too immoral, or alternatively may result in too few or maybe too many issues!

The possibility that minority pressure groups might be allowed to influence the librarian's book selection and display equally amazed the Malmö staff.

This Malmö librarian's comment on the *Assistant* was "it tends to be full of librarians' quarrels."

In the April issue of the *Assistant*, Mr. Callander writes "poor libraries . . . would not be changed by government aid," and "people who live in the country do so from choice and just as they forgo easy access to theatres and art galleries, so they *MUST* forgo a first-class library service." May I disagree, at the same time accepting Mr. Callander's condemnation of poor librarians. Most people who live in the country do so by accident of birth, and most remain there because it is there that they find their livelihood. Some may prefer to live in the country for the same reasons that some town dwellers prefer to live in suburbs, but not because either choose to be without the social and cultural amenities of the city centre. Occasional Arts Council productions in rural areas have been well attended, and drama groups are quite common, but the absence of good cultural amenities makes the appreciation of them more difficult.

When there is a good country library service it is almost invariably well used. National standards, inspection and government aid have made possible in Denmark a better rural library service than we have in this more prosperous country. State-aided regional reference libraries and a state-aided bibliographical centre could help to bring nearer to the countryman the ideal of a first-class library service. State-aid could free our library systems from the procrustean bed of our geographical counties and could make possible administrative library units comprising social catchment areas centred on a nodal point (to use McColvin's phrases) still functioning as part of our local government system. Even if the resulting areas had to be smaller than McColvin suggested, they would at least be cohesive. A first-class library service for the countryman is a possibility. It would be a pity if we sacrificed him on the issue desk of the large town library.

Meanwhile since state aid is not immediately forthcoming, we could have regional or "all county" reference libraries (and regional or "all county" service to industry) by co-operation. These services might lead to Government aid. What other countries can do with national standards and Government aid we also can do, and our poor libraries could thereby be a good deal better.

K. R. TOMLINSON, *Loughborough School of Librarianship*.  
*Is Reading Necessary?*

May I express my appreciation of Mr. Brian Selby's article in your March issue on Ranganathans theories? To one who, like myself, has had neither the energy to read the master nor the opportunity to hear him, these precepts and reflections come as a welcome blessing. But does the great man himself really support the question:—

"Can we conscientiously believe that we are *instilling* the reading habit into the lower I.Q.'s and assuring the *proper* use of the leisure of the people by providing libraries which are often nothing more than collections of entertainment reading?" (My italics as they say).

Is reading books such a vital and necessary habit for lower I.Q.'s *et al?* Can we conscientiously believe that the missing 75 per cent. from our doors are all souls in need of conversion. No one will disagree that reading is a necessary tool and accomplishment in modern life; it is also a pleasant habit for those many who enjoy it. Again, no one could reasonably deny the purposes and usefulness of the public library service—facts, information, study facilities, the provision of technical, practical, and imaginative literature for both adults and children—all uncontestedly necessary. But granted all this, reading is still a means to an end and not an end in itself. Many people will read when they require information or have been urged to read a particular book, but their need fulfilled they feel no further necessity to read. Television apart, their lives give them direct occupation and satisfaction enough.

As for, "Instilling the reading habit into the lower I.Q.'s", surely this is at sad variance with the opportunities for advice and guidance offered informally by a good Readers' Advisory Service. No doubt in India with the colossal problems presented by mass illiteracy, the Librarian should adopt the pedagogic

function of the Educationist, but in Great Britain how could he reconcile the increased reading of this group with such a sweeping condemnation of "Collections of entertainment reading."

"The proper use of leisure." Presumably Librarians will have the key to this mystery—they must know how books can promote a more effective use of leisure. Are we then, one wonders, as a class noticeably happier or better occupied than others. There are other means . . .

Let us have new ideas, experiments and theories by all means. Let us hope they will stimulate us to self-examination and improvement as we *march* towards the new millennium (*walking backwards* would be very uncomfortable). But please, doctors all, more realism; a sterner suppression of these polysyllabic clichés which inflate your wiser words; and above all—a little humility. Reading is not an isolated activity. It exists in relation to the total life of the individual, just as surely as intelligence itself is one feature only in a complete personality.

LEONARD C. BURTON.

A number of letters on an article in April about Birmingham Library have been held over to give the staff there more time to reply.

## Correspondence Courses

### First Professional Examination

As from October this year, the period of the above course will be extended. The next one will commence in November and prepare students for the examination in November, 1958. The closing date for applications will be September 30th. The following courses will commence at the same time as those for the Registration and Final courses. This means that there will be none in preparation for the First Professional Examination in June, 1958.



—for our being as yet unable to enrol him as a subscriber, but meanwhile he will find KEESING'S in Public Libraries all over the Earth.

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#### COURSES IN LIBRARIANSHIP

A FULL-TIME COURSE in LIBRARIANSHIP is provided at Ealing Technical College in preparation for the Library Association's Registration Examination.

Part-time courses are also held at the College for the First Professional, Registration and Final Examinations.

The new session will commence on Monday, 23rd September, 1957.

Further information may be obtained from the Principal,

C. E. GURR, M.Sc., PhD.,  
Secretary to the Education Committee.

# Recruiting

*L. C. Guy, Lending Librarian, St. Marylebone Public Library*

**T**HREE can be few libraries in this country not faced with difficulty in recruiting staff and it may be assumed that much thought has been given to ways and means of filling staff vacancies. An opportunity to take part in a Careers Convention held at Wembley County School was offered to me, as an old pupil of the school, in early February this year. The Convention was open for two nights from 7 p.m. to 9.30 p.m., those pupils leaving school this and next summer together with their parents, were invited to attend. The "exhibitors," if one may so call the various representatives of careers, were allotted classrooms and could bring any display material they desired. Quite elaborate displays were provided by the large firms, national Boards, the Services and similar organisations, but for the professions, bodies such as the Civil Service, medicine, local government and librarianship, a desk or two sufficed. However, expecting something like this, we displayed some twenty or so large photographs illustrating the variety of work in a public library, a selection of reading lists and some annual reports.

This then was the simple lay-out—what were the consequences? My wife, ex-children's librarian, came with me to the first night, since we had no idea what the response would be, and to deepen our gloom it poured with rain all day and had not ceased by 7 p.m. After a quick tour of the Convention we returned to our classroom at 6.50 p.m., mentally bracing ourselves to see other exhibitors rushed off their feet whilst we attracted little attention, and waited. Five minutes later, prior to the official opening time, we had our first enquirer, a mother and daughter together with, we presumed, an aunt. It was obvious from the speed with which they had reached us that their interest was pre-formed, and we were duly heartened. We had agreed beforehand that we would enumerate the various snags to the profession first of all and this was a sound basis since it gave us the opportunity to discover if either the child or parent had considered them. If they had, and were still interested, then we assumed the interest was serious and explained the conditions of service, the examinations, the type of work and the various types of library in some detail. One factor which proved an obstacle in some cases was the necessary educational standard required for entry into the profession, particularly the study of a foreign language as this ultimate necessity seemed not to be known to either parents or children. The case of a child being sent to college to become a librarian after graduation occurred and as the girl concerned was taking several languages, it was possible to point to many openings. The parents realised that an aptitude for languages was likely to be an asset but from that point they knew of no particular steps that could be taken for her to make the best of her qualifications. Of the various branches where languages would be a benefit the girl was most attracted to the B.B.C. libraries.

During the first evening we spoke to seven children and their parents, several others looked at the photographs and exhibits but did not remain to enquire further. The second evening we added a further ten names to our list. This may not seem many but it must be realised that these seventeen wished to know *all* about librarianship, and we found that a quarter of an hour at least was needed for each enquirer so that by 9.30 p.m. each evening we were utterly exhausted, having had barely twenty minutes free on either session. We reached several conclusions from this experience and these I will now discuss.

The scheme of a Convention with live representation of careers seemed eminently satisfactory, particularly so in our case where only by word of mouth can one illustrate the profession. It does not lend itself to displays of material which would give the recruit some idea of what the work will be. The parents were satisfied, feeling that they had received individual attention, had been able to ask any questions to assist in their decision and to discover the suitability of their child to the proposed career. From the librarian's point of view we were able to assess the suitability of the child and therefore whether or not to encourage her. During the interview our questions were directed mainly at the child in an effort to encourage her to talk and state opinions, thoughts and interests. Several of the parents at first tried to head off this approach by stepping in and answering for the child, but by persisting in the direct approach we overcame this and managed to get the child speaking for herself. (I must interpolate here that the "child" in all cases bar one was female, although the school is co-educational).

Inevitably, some of the parents were endeavouring to fit their daughter into the quiet, scholastic surroundings of a librarian since she was reserved, fond of books and not very strong! Our answer to this was late hours, almost continuous standing and constant contact with people (apart, of course, from certain special types of library). However, it appeared that our picture of librarianship was more acceptable to the child than the parent, that it was only the latter who imagined it a quiet, sheltered life. A possible reason for this may be that most of the children used a public library and were acquainted with its general atmosphere, whereas the parents were not.

A fondness for reading was in most cases the origin of the urge to be a librarian, and time and again we emphasised that this was not enough. Equally important, probably more so in the case of public library work, is the desire and ability to mix with all kinds of people, to be interested in them and their requirements. This point was willingly accepted but did not seem to have occurred to the recruits or their parents.

### **Awkward Hours—and Libraries**

The question of aptitude was of great interest and had obviously been given consideration by the parents even if in a negative way from the librarianship point of view. The child was not good at mathematics, not interested in science, yet had a good grounding in most subjects without being brilliant. Of course, this probably covers the vast majority of school leaving children, but the lively interest, the child with some sense of awareness was the one we were looking for, not the drifter. Having talked with the child generally, the next stage was studying and without exception all the enquirers realised that there were several years of study ahead of them after leaving school. Not one of the parents was aware of the possibility of obtaining grants to attend library school, or of a full-time course of study on the subject. Most were worried at the prospect of the child working late on two or three nights and spending at least one other at an evening class. We explained that classes were run at various times during the day so that librarianship students were not asked to sacrifice one or two of their valuable free nights. One girl had, however, discovered from a friend, presumably already working in a library, that the authority would not adjust hours of work so that staff could attend classes during the day. If this is so, then of course, that authority is doing little to assist in recruiting for itself. The stages of the examination syllabus did not seem to be too frightening to any of the girls, and most parents seemed to think that the passing of the Registration

examination would be within the capabilities of their child.

By far the most awkward problem came at the end of a session with those really set on the idea of librarianship as a career. The invariable request was to whom should the parents refer with a view to obtaining a post? One or two wished to work locally and we referred them to the County Librarian of Middlesex. Most of the candidates either through the advice of their parents or their own personal investigations, wanted to work in a London library. Possibly the chances of promotion seemed better in a larger library sited more or less on one spot as against a County system of 5 or 6 staff in many scattered places, but we carefully explained the considerable amount of movement that takes place within the profession when seeking posts after qualification. The prospect of wider experience in the London libraries with their many departmental activities must, however, be considered the major attraction. One consideration against working locally was mentioned by several girls, this being the fear of embarrassment at having to attend to friends and neighbours and even late school-friends when working in the immediate vicinity of home. We did mention the outstanding London libraries with reasonable ease of access to those living in or around Wembley, and in addition referred parents to the Secretary of the Library Association for any further advice at a later date. Each enquirer was also given the Library Association's pamphlet, "The Library Profession." The lack of uniformity in conditions of service other than a 38-hour week made it difficult to state precisely what the new entrant would find herself doing or how she would be trained and what facilities she would be granted in studying. We were often pressed for an outright recommendation as to which was the best authority to approach and had to spend some minutes explaining the absence of any "best" authority.

One case proved most interesting and worth reporting here as probably typical of a common opinion of librarianship. The father, a youngish man, came with his daughter who was extremely keen on becoming a librarian. The parent was even more keen on discouraging her, thinking the career offered little of interest, and no prospects.

For over half-an-hour we chatted and answered his questions—salary scales—study facilities—how long had I been in the profession—what did I do all day? what would his daughter do for the first six months or so—what was the work of a qualified librarian, and so on. We won his confidence and interest, explained some of the highlights of our own careers, spoke of the various departments in the larger libraries and eventually he departed quite prepared to back his daughter in her own enthusiastic approach. This parent served to show the abysmal lack of knowledge concerning a librarian's work which must prove perhaps the greatest discouragement in recruiting, for it must be assumed that the child, even though very interested, would have been discouraged by her father from taking up his career.

A point noted by several families was the reasonable standard of salary for the new entrant and its range for the unqualified; this was a

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bit of a surprise, but when compared with other careers represented, proved correct. The A.P.T. salaries for a girl passing her Registration examination at about 22 to 25 also seemed acceptable and the lower reaches of the A.P.T. grades after that but there was some comment on the lack of return for studying beyond the A.L.A. stage and taking the Final examination.

However, returning to the experiment, we felt from later comments that we had had some extra success and closeness of contact because we were two fairly young people still retaining the enthusiasm of youth for our chosen profession and this allowed an easier approach by the child. She did not feel herself being disposed of by a committee of parents discussing the matter with their own contemporaries. Which brings me to the final point. We were closetted with three representatives of local government; they received very few enquiries indeed. They had no display material but were **VERY SENIOR OFFICERS**, under the circumstances of this convention I would say an error of judgment. We endeavoured to be quietly enthusiastic, but not forward, to be efficient and decided in our opinions and to give neither "big business" sales-talk nor back-slapping bon-homie. We were prepared to go down fighting, and to our surprise and delight found this almost phenomenal interest. Perhaps others in co-operation with their educational authority will be encouraged to experiment in this manner because we are now quite sure that the recruits exist and the greatest disability is lack of contact and guidance. With the general advent of school libraries and the greater emphasis on them it does seem that it is the parents who have to be converted to allowing their children to enter the profession and not the children themselves who have to be encouraged. Are we being too optimistic? Of course, the seventeen children have not yet left school, so that our final record cannot be completed, but at least three are very interested, having sought further assistance from me since the Convention, and even that, from one Convention, would make the two evenings very well spent.

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# MOBILE LIBRARIES

## The Last Five Years

*By C. T. Nicholls, Superintendent, Travelling Library Service*

*West Riding County Library*

The growing popularity of the travelling library, as a comparatively modern medium for book provision, is evidenced by the increasing number of vehicles which are being operated by both County and Municipal authorities throughout the country. The post-war difficulties in providing buildings for library purposes has doubtless given much impetus to the travelling library movement, but it is no exaggeration to say that the intrinsic value of this form of service is the principal reason for their widespread popularity. A cursory glance at the pages of library periodicals—not to mention annual reports—demonstrates the great potential of the travelling library, and in so far as service to the reader living in rather isolated areas is concerned, it represents the answer to an hitherto unsolved problem. Indeed, the travelling library is now accepted as the only effective method of providing a service to those people who do not enjoy the amenities of community life. The number of County Library authorities who have not already embarked upon, or who are not seriously contemplating, the inauguration of a travelling library service, must be small—the movement is so much in favour at present that even many municipal authorities are rapidly acquiring vehicles in order to provide a service to new centres of population which ultimately, and when circumstances are more propitious, will need branch libraries.

During the past five years the West Riding County Library has added seven vehicles of varied types and sizes to its existing fleet, which (including vehicles now being built) numbers twenty-three. In fact the size of the fleet warranted the appointment some five years ago of the author of this article to his present post—designated as Superintendent of the Travelling Library Service—and as far as is known, the position is a unique one; no parallel appears to exist elsewhere in the country. One may well broach the question "What do I do?" My duties are manifold, and a detailed account would only serve to bore the readers of this article, but as a specialist officer, I feel that some information about my work may be of interest to others. I share with my Chief responsibility for the design of new vehicles in accordance with the changing trends in commercial vehicle practice, and I am responsible for the planning of routes and the inauguration of new service-points, the periodic inspection of vehicles in operation and those under construction, the supervision of the staff and of the vehicles with particular reference to the maintenance of the latter, the general co-ordination of the service, and assistance of the many librarians, from home and overseas, who visit the West Riding County Library to inspect our Travelling Library Service. I must, in addition, mention the fact that in the absence of either Librarian or Driver-Assistant, and provided no other reliefs are forthcoming, I fill the breach; and having performed these duties on numerous occasions, I can speak authoritatively regarding the respective tasks of each member of vehicle crews.

Although our fleet is the largest in the country, complete coverage of the County has still to be achieved, and it is hoped that the final objective will be realised within the next few years. Our vehicles fall into three categories, all specially designed for the purpose on hand. The fleet comprises thirteen small "travelling libraries" for service to hamlets and

isolated dwellings, seven "mobile branch libraries" for village service and two "semi-trailer libraries" plus one spare. All vehicles are manned by a staff of two—a Librarian-in-charge and a Driver-Assistant; the latter, apart from driving, maintaining and cleaning the vehicle, assists with the charging, discharging and other routine clerical work.

Some authorities to-day are operating travelling libraries manned only by a Driver-Librarian, but in our opinion this system savours of false economy. Some few years ago the West Riding County Library experimented with the Driver-Librarian method, and the results were somewhat revealing. The length of time required at each service point was rather more than doubled, the total issue in the prolonged period was—contrary to expectations—less, the vehicles were invariably congested and the Driver-Librarian had little, if any, time to give assistance to readers; one result was that the non-fiction issue dropped by approximately 40 per cent. The Driver-Librarian method, if adopted by this county, would necessitate doubling the size of the fleet, and even if this was within the realms of possibility the service would be inferior to existing standards and the quality of the reading lower. Whilst on the subject of the staffing of vehicles, it is interesting to note that in our Travelling Library Service a crew is permanently allocated to a particular vehicle, whereas many authorities operate a system of interchangeability. It is considered that the permanent assignment of a particular crew to a vehicle results in a more efficient and better co-ordinated service.

During the past five years many improvements have been made in the design and equipment of travelling libraries operated by the West Riding County Library, and two features worth mention are an entrance porch on the larger type of vehicle, designed to exclude draughts and to conserve heat, and the system of lighting which uses either battery or mains electricity supply with only one set of lamps. When using the mains (by plugging in to selected points) electric heating is also available, in addition to the usual bus-type heater.

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Apart from the "go-anywhere" virtues of the travelling library, the quality of the issue as compared with static service-points deserves mention; in many instances in the West Riding of Yorkshire where vehicles have replaced village library centres, the non-fiction issues have increased threefold and frequently more. During the year 1955-56 the non-fiction issue from the travelling library service was as high as 37.7 per cent.

It may be thought that the superior service afforded by travelling libraries must of necessity be a more costly one, but provided the book stock is taken into consideration when costs are calculated, the position is that travelling libraries may even cost less than service by library centres. With the latter, large numbers of books are required in total to provide even quite meagre selections on the shelves—in other words travelling libraries require fewer books to provide larger selections to comparable populations, and therein lies the explanation of the difference in costs.

Whilst not the pioneers of the travelling library movement, the West Riding County Library has probably made as much progress and advancement in recent years as any other authority, and quite obviously there must be some sound reason for their concentration on this form of service. The three fundamentals of a good library service as we in the West Riding of Yorkshire envisage them are firstly, a good and comprehensive selection of books; secondly the employment of a qualified librarian; and thirdly the provision of adequate and attractive accommodation—it is considered that a modern and well-appointed travelling library holding a book stock ranging from 1,000—3,000 volumes, manned by a qualified librarian and a driver-assistant and making weekly or fortnightly calls, is in fact the best practical expression of these beliefs where the small community is concerned.

Many of the original arguments against travelling libraries and the recognised disadvantages known to have been associated with them have, with the passage of time and in the light of actual experience, lost much of their weight. After some ten years of operational experience with small, medium and large vehicles in the West Riding of Yorkshire, it has been proved that their vulnerability to adverse weather conditions is less than had been feared, and in fact during the winter of 1955-56 only 1.7 per cent. of the total number of 3,678 service-points were missed owing to snow, ice and fog. Weather conditions in the West Riding do vary from one extreme to the other, and road conditions in the more mountainous parts (the Pennines run the full length of the county) can be, through snow and ice, extremely treacherous. Such an achievement is in no small way due to the tenacity, courage and determination of the vehicle crews and also to their dexterous use of skid chain, shovel and grit—we are just as proud of them as are the public they serve. For obvious reasons, vehicles operating in mountainous and exposed areas under conditions of snow and ice and manned singly by a Driver-Librarian would not achieve the same progress as those doubly manned, and this appears to be further justification for the West Riding system of staffing each vehicle with a Librarian-in-charge and a Driver-Assistant. Accidents and mechanical breakdowns have in practice resulted in little interference with services; spare vehicles are always standing-by ready to take over, and additionally there is a dual-purpose delivery-vehicle-cum-mobile-library which can be switched at one day's notice from the former—and normal—role to the latter.

In the majority of West Riding villages served by travelling libraries a "local representative," who is available by telephone, has been nominated; in the event of a breakdown, or of the cancellation of the service

for any reason, the Librarian-in-charge of the vehicle communicates with this representative, who in turn, informs the borrowers. The scheme has been well accepted and does much to retain the permanent goodwill of borrowers. Another objection to service by travelling libraries, advanced by the early sceptics, was the fact that the service given was a predominantly day-time one and it was considered that the man or woman in employment would only rarely have an opportunity of using it. Practice has shown that in rural areas this difficulty is not a serious one, and daytime service appears to be satisfactory; an occasional tête-à-tête between the normally-absent borrower and the Librarian-in-charge has resulted in complete understanding regarding tastes and book requirements. In urban areas the position is different, and there is a clear need for evening service; all the large vehicles operated by the West Riding give an evening service on three days a week, and occasional extension of this practice to those small travelling libraries where an evening service is considered desirable, does much to reduce this objection to a mere shadow.

So much for the past—but what of the future? With the narrowing of the initial difference in price between petrol and diesel engined vehicles (the latter being far more economical in fuel consumption), the availability of a range of plastics for body construction purposes, the recent modifications to the Construction and Use regulations, which allow vehicles over four tons in unladen weight to be of greater dimensions than hitherto, and improvements and developments in the heating of vehicles, it is my earnest hope and belief that during the coming five years travelling libraries will become an even more familiar part of, at least, the rural scene. I believe, too, that there is still considerable scope for improved designs, so that they become in truth more clearly "mobile libraries" and less like vans fitted with shelves; it is something of an indication of failure to develop their full potentialities that they are still so widely described by both librarians and public as "library vans"!

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